



The Menopause: a Practical Guide & Support Tips For Business Leaders

Hanover.

CELEBRATING **25** YEARS

www.hanoversearch.com

Contents:

Introduction

Why we need to do more

What is the menopause?

What is the peri-menopause?

What challenges does the menopause pose in the workplace?

A lack of awareness in menopausal support

The impact of experiencing menopause in the workplace

The effect of the menopause on employers

Practical Guidance: Supporting menopausal employees

Getting the best from those experiencing menopausal symptoms

Developing a menopause policy

Practical Guidance: How to support leaders in supporting women at work

Examples of companies with good menopause support

Menopause support at Hanover

Conclusion: The moment of menopausal support is here

The Menopause: a Practical Guide & Support Tips For Business Leaders

Hanover explores methods for managing and mitigating the sometimes debilitating effects of the menopause for staff in the workplace.

The menopause is a topic that has long been taboo in the workplace, despite it being something that over half of the entire population experience.

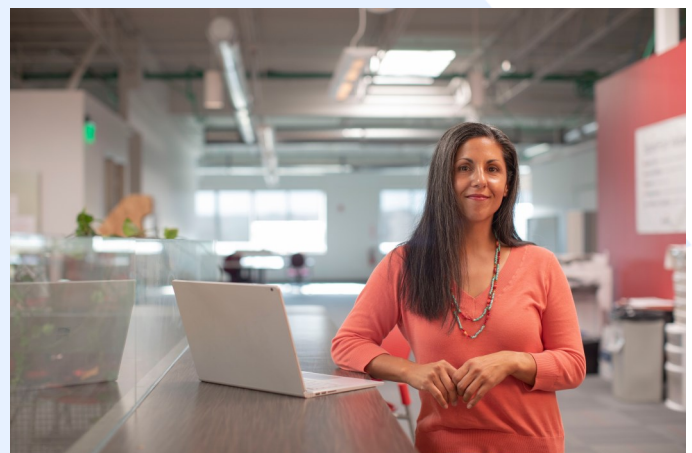
At this very moment, in fact, [13 million women](#) in the UK are peri- or post-menopausal, and one in four of those women are experiencing severely debilitating symptoms. This information, coupled with the fact that menopausal women are the [fastest-growing demographic](#) in the workplace, yet millions of them are leaving work, should be a clear indicator as to why this article and the practical tips we're offering is important.

In 2017, the Government Equalities Office published an [evidence review](#) which shows how going through the menopause deeply impacts a woman's economic participation in the UK. Some of the findings are detailed below:

- ♦ **Some aspects of work can make symptoms worse**, especially hot or poorly ventilated environments, formal meetings and deadlines. Women consistently feel that **those around them at work are unsympathetic or treat them badly**.
- ♦ **Women are now working later in life** than ever before. In the UK, there are around 4.3 million women aged 50+ in work.
- ♦ Symptoms are not always the direct result of hormonal changes. Instead a '**domino effect**' may occur, where one symptom causes others. For example, night sweats may cause insomnia, which then leads to irritability, fatigue and poorer cognitive function.

This is a direct threat to women and members of the LGBTQ+ community currently at work, who may find the workplace a real challenge, not just because of the symptoms they may be experiencing, but also due to a lack of understanding and support.

In fact, a [recent survey](#) of over 2000 women aged 45-67 found that 63% of workplaces have no policy in place to help employees through the menopause. Those surveyed also revealed that the menopause is the "second most devastating impact on their career to date", after having children. Many women suffering with the menopause are left feeling forced to leave their jobs.





Why we need to do more

The existing framework (or non-existent framework) is clearly not enough. [Real accounts](#) published by thousands of women have detailed how they were pushed out of work, with one woman recounting how her employer placed her on performance monitoring after she'd submitted a doctor's note for depression linked to the menopause, while another was reminded of her "being in the menopause" every time she made a slight error.

These discriminatory procedures and humiliating comments are not only driving those in menopause out of work, but much further. In an article published by the Guardian, a woman named Mara detailed how adverse treatment at work left her seriously contemplating suicide. Walking along a bridge and readying herself to jump, the only reason she is alive today, she wrote, is because, "the bridge wasn't high enough. I knew I'd survive, and I wanted to die."

On the other side of this unpleasant coin, there are thousands of women who won't experience any symptoms at all, but who may face discriminatory treatment simply due to their gender and age. Sukie Stratton, an Insurance Inspector from Gloucestershire, who also put her own account forward, revealed that her colleagues and seniors would make disparaging comments about her age and how she "must be in the menopause," even though she wasn't experiencing any severe symptoms.

Very soon, there could be codes of practice enshrined in the UK legal system, as the [House of Commons women and equalities committee](#) reviews how the law protects women experiencing menopausal and perimenopausal symptoms while at work. These evidence sessions, which explored the relevant and applicable law and questioned whether it is fit for purpose, took place throughout January 2022, with the outcome yet to be revealed.

The menopause should be seen as an occupational health problem, because that's exactly what it is. And it's also an equality issue, not just for women in general, but for black women, LGBTQ+ individuals and younger women who have undergone necessary surgery or are experiencing early menopause.

"I was on a great career trajectory and was a high-performer in my company's sales team. A few years ago, I was promoted to sales director.

Fast-forward to today and I'm running a successful team and doing really well on the surface, but over the last six months or so, something has changed for me internally.

I started to become really anxious in meetings, typically in important meetings with clients or with the rest of my male-dominated leadership team. I felt like I shouldn't be there because I didn't have enough experience. I couldn't answer questions or make decisions - in short, I was riddled with imposter syndrome.

Luckily, I had access to outside support and I worked through the reasons I felt like this. I found out that imposter syndrome is one of the symptoms of the perimenopause, and just realising that it is a symptom has helped me view what's happening in a different light. I'm now working on understanding it better, and learning when it manifests and how to deal with it so it doesn't affect my career."

Jen, Sales Director, 48

It is essential that no 'group' is singled out or identified, as many employees may be reluctant to disclose information out of fear of discrimination.

But before we go further into looking at how we should be dealing with the menopause and peri-menopause in the workplace, both from a woman's perspective but also from the perspective of leaders throughout the business, it's important to understand what the menopause is.

WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSE?

The menopause typically happens when a woman is between 45 and 55 years of age. Oestrogen levels naturally decline, and eventually menstruation ends. Symptoms of the menopause are different for every single person who experiences it. The menopause process is split into two parts: the peri-menopause and the menopause itself.

It's essential to remember that the menopause doesn't just affect women aged 45-55. The people who may be experiencing menopause include transgender men (who were assigned female at birth) and younger women who are experiencing premature, medical or surgical menopause, which will also come with the potentially devastating fact that they are no longer able to conceive.

Transgender women may also experience pseudo-menopausal symptoms if they stop taking hormone therapies or if their hormone levels fluctuate. People in same-sex relationships may also find the menopause particularly difficult if both partners suffer symptoms concurrently. Disabled employees who have existing health conditions and are suffering from symptoms of the menopause may also have more complex needs.

We believe that it is not an individual's responsibility to disclose whether or not they are experiencing menopause, instead the onus should be on every employer to provide a suitable environment with effective menopause policies in place should someone need them.

What is the peri-menopause?

The peri-menopause is the period of hormonal change leading to the menopause. This can last for up to 12 years and brings with it a variety of symptoms, ranging from minimal annoyances through to debilitating change. Not all women experience all symptoms and, in fact, some may not experience any.

Due to a lack of awareness and understanding around the peri-menopause, many women fail to realise that symptoms they're experiencing could be the result of the peri-menopause, and this can cause even more complications and loss of self-confidence. This is exacerbated by a [concerning scarcity of adequate medical training courses](#). Around 15,000 doctors, nurses and trainee GPs have taken the [FourteenFish Confidence in Menopause course](#) to combat the lack of this material in their existing medical training.



Common peri-menopausal symptoms include:

- ◆ Night sweats
- ◆ Fatigue
- ◆ Insomnia
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Low libido
- ◆ Low mood & frequent mood swings
- ◆ Hot flushes
- ◆ Joint pain
- ◆ Itchiness
- ◆ Headaches
- ◆ Breast tenderness
- ◆ Weight gain
- ◆ Loss of concentration and brain fog
- ◆ Poor memory
- ◆ Brittle bones (osteoporosis)
- ◆ Hair loss
- ◆ Rapid heartbeat
- ◆ Discomfort during sex & vaginal dryness
- ◆ Allergies



WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THE MENOPAUSE POSE IN THE WORKPLACE?

The menopause raises considerable challenges in the workplace, not just to women who may be experiencing symptoms, but to employers, leaders and colleagues. It truly is something that can affect everyone. Diversity and inclusion particularly can be at serious risk, and this needs to be addressed by employers.

In addition, the physical impact of menopausal symptoms can make a woman's working life unbearable. Hot flushes coupled with insomnia, heavy bleeding and joint pain make for difficult work days. If an employer doesn't create a considerate environment for these issues, it's easy to see why so many menopausal women no longer feel welcome at work.

From an employee perspective, it's difficult to know what is reasonable to request, and this is mainly due to a lack of precedence. Recently, companies such as [ASOS](#) have implemented new gender-neutral policies to support employees going through the menopause and other "health-related life events". These include:

- ◆ Flexible working and time off at short notice
- ◆ Paid leave for those who have experienced a pregnancy loss or who are having fertility treatment
- ◆ 10 days of leave for those who have suffered pregnancy loss, including miscarriages, abortions and surrogacies, including partners

If this sort of revolution is possible in the fashion industry where youth is often held at a premium, then there is no excuse for stigmatisation anywhere else.

However, while some women may be pleased at the prospect of no longer having to hide this natural process, others are understandably reluctant to bring this discussion into a public forum, perhaps feeling that they may be overlooked for promotion, given less exciting projects or think that their position will be compromised.

This is especially relevant for transgender or gender fluid persons, who prefer not to disclose information relating to their genders. In some environments, there is still a stigma attached to ageing women, and many feel that discussions with their employer about the menopause would only exacerbate this.

This is a tricky line for employers and leaders to tread, which is why menopausal policies should include an approachable 'safe space' for those to access what they need, when they might need it.

A lack of awareness in menopausal support

Many of the issues surrounding this topic are rooted in a lack of awareness around the menopause itself. This snowballs into a lack of knowledge about what support is needed, a lack of knowledge about how it affects careers and how evolved gender roles can tie into this too.

For example, at the average age of menopause, employees may potentially still raising young children, or are playing a care-giving role for older relatives - this variation in generational roles makes it impossible for employers and leaders to put a 'one solution suits all' plaster over this issue.

And a lack of awareness all too often leads to ignorance. A [STUC \(Scottish Trades Union Congress\) Women's Committee](#) survey revealed that the menopause was either met with contempt (32% of respondents) or ill-humour (63% of respondents). Such instances include where jokes are made about hot flushes and "the change", while some women even report being belittled and humiliated at work due to severe symptoms.

THE IMPACT OF EXPERIENCING MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

The majority of working women experiencing the menopause revealed that it had a negative impact on their role. In a [study](#) of 1,409 women carried out by YouGov, it was found that:

- ♦ 65% of women were less able to concentrate
- ♦ 58% experienced higher levels of stress
- ♦ 52% said they had less patience to deal with both colleagues and customers
- ♦ 30% had taken leave without feeling comfortable enough to tell their employer why
- ♦ A higher number of women (48%) felt more supported by their colleagues than those who felt supported by their managers (32%)



As for reasons why the women didn't want to disclose the fact that they were in menopause, the results were 45% privacy and 34% embarrassment, while 32% anticipated a negative reaction from an unsupportive manager.

The **direct effect** of this is that some of these women leave the workplace - taking with them years of expertise.

According to a BUPA report carried out in 2019, 900,000 women in the UK left their jobs over an undefined period of time because of menopausal symptoms.

That's a lot of skill, experience and knowledge that businesses no longer have. Without support in place at work, these employees find it easier to change jobs or even give up work completely, which could also cause them financial harm.

This is a shocking and sad reality for the majority of the population, who will experience the menopause and most likely while at work. It's important for employers and managers to be aware that menopausal people will most likely be grappling with hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances and psychological issues such as mood swings and anxiety.

The effect of the menopause on employers

Naturally, women leaving their workplace will have an effect on employers and the company itself. If you take a moment to ask yourself, "if we don't provide support for those experiencing menopause symptoms and they feel forced to leave, what will happen?" You'll be looking at the following:

- ♦ A gap where there should be experience
- ♦ A direct reduction in diversity
- ♦ The risk of reduced profits (research has proven that businesses with a diverse and inclusive workforce make more money)
- ♦ Other talent following suit if they see key talent leaving the business
- ♦ A less attractive company profile for prospective, high-level talent



At menopausal age, women are often in the prime of their career with a wealth of experience and expertise to offer. By failing to support them, businesses miss out on the value of different perceptions and they are deprived of highly valuable skill sets. In short, businesses lose out.

These women and individuals are at the peak of their careers and have often gone through years of professional training. It makes good business sense to retain someone with so much to offer.

A failure to support employees with menopausal symptoms can also lead to legal risk, including unfair dismissal claims and discrimination complaints.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE: SUPPORTING MENOPAUSAL EMPLOYEES

So, now that you're aware of the effects of the menopause, how can you provide support? We suggest taking four simple steps:

1. Start with **talking** about the menopause and breaking the taboo.
2. Make the menopause a **whole workplace issue**. This will avoid having to identify any group in particular and make it known to everyone that they will be supported, and will also educate any employees who might not understand the menopause, eradicating uncertainty.
3. **Identify what adjustments** can be made, as well as any reasonable individual adjustments necessary.
4. Finally, you should begin to build your own **workplace menopause policy**.

We appreciate that this will often demand a subjective approach based on your organisation, how employees work and what is physically possible. The best way to start is to try and take actions that will help alleviate any difficult and challenging symptoms.

For example:

- ♦ Insomnia and sleep disturbances are common. You can combat this with flexible working and optional late starts.
- ♦ On average, 80% of women going through menopause will have to deal with hot flushes. An easy way to combat this is by supplying staff with a USB desk fan or seating them near a window they can open.
- ♦ Many people don't want to disclose the fact that they are in menopause. Training managers and having menopause and wellbeing champions will ensure that women have a safe place and person to go to if their symptoms become too much.

Getting the best from those experiencing menopausal symptoms

It's in an employer's best interest to help alleviate challenging symptoms and enable employees to bring their best selves to work.

You may need to consider risk assessments and recommend occupational health referrals for extreme symptoms. Here's what you can do within the workplace to help combat difficult and painful symptoms:

Symptom	Actions
Anxiety	Identify a 'buddy' the colleague can talk to outside of their immediate team. Allow time away to work on relaxation techniques. Encourage mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises or leaving their desk to go for a short walk. Subsidised yoga/meditation classes.
Headaches	Easy access to drinking water. Have a quiet place available for breaks. Allow time outs for taking medication and resting.
Hot flushes	Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk, or relocating near a window/away from heat source. Set up an area indoors or even sheltered outdoors and encourage employees to take regular breaks. Provide easy access to drinking water facilities.
Light/heavy periods	Set up a sanitary product station in toilets. Ensure that toilets are permanently accessible. Offer to relocate any employees closer to toilets if they need it. Have shower facilities available onsite.
Loss of confidence	Schedule regular personal development discussions. Schedule regular time with their manager to discuss any issues and for the manager to share positive, constructive feedback.
Low mood	Approve of taking 'time out' sessions when things become too much. Identify a buddy or champion that the employee can talk to. Have an area reserved for time out sessions for those who need some space to clear their head.

Muscular aches and bone and joint pain

Work with H&S to review existing equipment and provide alternatives where possible.

Subsidised massage therapy/yoga.

Panic attacks

Regular time out sessions.

Encourage mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises or leaving their desk to go for a short walk.

Identify a buddy or champion.

Subsidised yoga/meditation classes.

Poor concentration

Ascertain whether there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse.

Review task allocation and workload - see if moving things around could help.

Provide memory-assisting equipment such as notepads, lists, journals, etc.

Offer a quiet space for them to work.

One in four women consider leaving their job because of menopause.

One in four women consider leaving their job because of menopause, according to the charity Wellbeing of Women. This lays bare the stark reality that there is a pool of experienced, senior female and transgender leaders that is shrinking due to a lack of support in the workplace. This is bad news for retention rates, diversity and inclusion, and the overall strength of the company itself.

There's also a direct link between employee wellness and productivity levels, which is why taking appropriate action to support those experiencing menopausal symptoms is in the best interests of the company.

Developing a menopause policy

With more and more industry leaders putting menopause policies in place, there is now some guidance as to what a comprehensive menopause policy should cover. The experts at [Menopause in the Workplace](#) recommend that:

- ♦ You should review all documents - are there any other policies that should now include a section on the menopause? This may include absence and sickness policies and DE&I policies.
- ♦ You should make the policy accessible and keep employees informed about where it is - you can do this by regularly publicising it and keeping lines of communication open.
- ♦ Work to understand the value of the document - policy writing shouldn't simply be a box ticking exercise. Every policy should be written with compassion and care for those who might need to rely on it.
- ♦ Policy documents do not equal training. High-quality training is still key, and should work to support, not replace, your documents.



PRACTICAL GUIDANCE: HOW TO SUPPORT LEADERS IN SUPPORTING WOMEN AT WORK

An important element of helping employees deal with their menopause symptoms at work is supporting the team leaders and senior staff members who will be enacting policy protocols and working directly with those affected.

One of the vital components of this is to position male members of staff as champions or allies. This will require a high level of training so that they are able to fully understand the peri-menopause and menopause, and recognise that it is not just as simple as having hot flushes and no longer being fertile.



Male staff members should be made to feel confident in this role, with freedom to ask questions they may not know the answers to. Supporting these employees could involve things like training, providing useful resources and conducting peer group sessions with those who have gone through or are currently going through menopause symptoms in the workplace and are happy to share details of their own experiences.

Some successful examples of providing support and resources include holding menopause awareness days and facilitating open conversations about menopause.

EXAMPLES OF COMPANIES WITH GOOD MENOPAUSE SUPPORT

Currently, there is insufficient legal guidance for companies to refer to when it comes to what the menopause means within the workplace. This is why many companies are looking to others for advice and examples of what support they can provide. Many companies, including the likes of Tesco, Santander and Anglian Water have signed the [Menopause Workplace Pledge](#), created by women's health charity, [Wellbeing of Women](#).

So what, exactly, are some of the important elements of good menopause support, and which companies have brought them into force?

Tesco

In 2019, Tesco [launched their own guide to women's health](#) and held an event with a panel of five inspirational women who shared their own experiences in a conversation with Tesco People Director Emma Taylor. An audio recording, together with videos further explaining the menopause, have been made available to colleagues. In addition, Tesco have introduced breathable fabrics into their uniforms to help menopausal employees with symptoms.

Age UK

Charity Age UK has an extensive [menopause policy](#) that covers practical guidance, offering simple solutions for alleviating symptoms such as noise-reducing headphones, USB desk fans, 'protected' work time and flexible working.

Aviva

Insurance company Aviva has also come up with creative, compassionate support solutions for those experiencing symptoms. In 2020, they introduced a service called 'Peppy' as part of the support package. Peppy is available to all Aviva employees and offers free, 45-minute private consultations and live chats

with menopause experts.

Chief People Officer Danny Harmer said: “Menopause need not be a barrier to a continued successful career. An open and empathetic culture, with proper training available for leaders, access to expert advice for individuals and supportive policies like flexible working, will help us better support our people, their partners and families during every stage of their lives.”

Santander

Banking giant Santander has also introduced the Peppy app after a pilot scheme saw 130 employees try the app for over a period of four weeks. 75% of those who used the app said that their symptoms were “less bothersome”, and a huge 90% revealed that they felt more positive about Santander as their employer. The bank went on to be named in the [Times’ Top 50 Employers for Women in 2021](#).

Diageo

Global beverage leader Diageo (which owns brands such as Guinness, Baileys and Cîroc) has launched their own [Thriving Through Menopause](#) guidelines. Their support mechanisms include:

- ♦ Access to counselling or mindfulness sessions through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- ♦ Increased flexibility where needed (e.g. changing working patterns or access to sick pay entitlements to deal with symptoms where appropriate)



One thing that each of these companies have in common is that they are giants in their fields, and therefore have the budget and resources available to make support accessible.

However, you don’t need a large amount of money to provide adequate support. Introducing simple things like flexible working, support forums and access to further resources is a great way to start supporting your employees.

Menopause support at Hanover

We firmly believe that providing proper menopause support for women and the wider workplace is crucial. At Hanover, our menopause support includes:

- ♦ **Cultural change**, with a big push to ensure all employees understand the challenges women in their forties and fifties are facing, through training, open conversations and wellbeing strategies.
- ♦ **Support groups** backed by an internal voluntary menopause support network. This provides a safe space for women to offload, connect and share experiences.
- ♦ **Financial support** in the form of £1,000 for female employees in their first year of suffering

menopausal symptoms. This covers two private consultations with a specialist menopause doctor and screening, and there are also annual follow up appointments.

- ♦ **Coaching** with regular 1-2-1 sessions with an independent coach, during which employees can talk through challenges, enhance performance and grow.
- ♦ **Flexible working** - Hanover has believed in flexible working for the last 25 years, so we're ahead of the curve when it comes to giving female employees the time they need.
- ♦ **Management training** to help leaders spot changes in patterns and to monitor employees' wellbeing in general.
- ♦ **Practical changes**, such as desk fans, unlimited access to cold drinking water, appropriate environmental temperature control, support and counselling.



We're also working hard to create environment in which everyone feels comfortable talking about the menopause. We're writing blog posts, running webinars and doing all we can to provide comfort for those experiencing symptoms.

CONCLUSION: THE MOMENT OF MENOPAUSAL SUPPORT IS HERE

The menopause is a very serious aspect of life in the workplace. Recent research and countless accounts from women has shown that there is a dire need for employers to take the menopause seriously. Fostering a culture of inclusivity is a positive thing for many different reasons, however, there are a number of commercial aspects to this, too. These include higher retention rates, wider profit margins, a boost in productivity levels, better DE&I and even a more attractive company profile.

Having adequate menopausal support in place is a win-win for both employees and employers. Staff can bring their best selves to work, productivity levels are sustained (or improved) and the company is attractive to the next generation of employees.

By raising awareness around this integral part of a woman's working life, employers will be providing useful toolkit for partners, friends, colleagues and family members on how to approach the menopause both in and out of work. This will in turn ensure a better environment and optimum job longevity for those in the prime of their career.

Hanover, through it's Talent Solutions arm, has a number of ways to help support clients, through Female Empowerment programmes, to workshops, to coaching, to support and drive an inclusive strategy.

Reach out and talk to us if you would like more information.

info@hanoversearch.com

www.hanoversearch.com